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TRIBUTE

TO

EBEN SPERRY STEARNS, D.D., LL.D.,

CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY, AND PRESIDENT OF THE NORMAL COLLEGE AT NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE,

AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE TRUSTEES

OF THE

PEABODY EDUCATION FUND,

NEW YORK, 5 OCTOBER, 1887.

CAMBRIDGE:
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TRIBUTE.

At the Annual Meeting of the Peabody Trustees of Southern Education, at New York, on the 5th of October, 1887, the Chairman, Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, in the course of his Introductory Address, announced the death of Dr. Stearns as follows: —

I was not a little shocked, Gentlemen, on the 11th of April last, by a telegram from Nashville announcing that Dr. Stearns, the President of our Normal College and the Chancellor of the Nashville University, had died suddenly on that very morning. I was not altogether unaware that for some months previously he had been less well than could have been wished. A letter had reached me, dated the 19th of February, which he had been unable to write with his own hand, and in which he spoke of himself as having suffered from a severe bilious attack; and I had not failed to notice with concern that on the following 25th of March he was not sufficiently recovered to preside at the Commemorative Services which he had so lovingly arranged, in honor of our Founder, for the twentieth anniversary of the date of our original Letter of Trust, and that the Address which he had prepared for that occasion

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had been read for him by his friend Professor Penfield. But no impression of any immediate or early danger had been communicated to me, or, indeed, had been conceived by those around him. On the contrary, it was thought by them and by himself that his health had been improving from day to day; and more than once even on the very last day of his life, — the 10th of April, — he was on his balcony, conversing cheerfully and confidently with his family. Before sunrise the next morning he had passed peacefully away. His widow and children, with his remains, reached Boston on the 15th, when Dr. Green accompanied me to the Albany station to meet them, and the burial took place at Mount Auburn the same afternoon.

The name of Eben Sperry Stearns is to be seen in capitals on the roll of the Class of 1841 of Harvard University, from which he received a degree of Master of Arts in 1845. He owed his degrees of Doctor of Divinity and Doctor of Laws to other colleges; but he always expressed a special interest in the welfare and honor of Harvard, at which his father and grandfather and great-grandfather, and more than one of his own brothers, had been graduated before him. Born in Bedford, Mass., on the 23d of December, 1819, the son of a Congregational minister, his mind was early turned to the subject of teaching, and he entered on that line of life very soon after he had finished his four years at Cambridge. He was successively employed as a teacher in a female seminary at Ipswich, in a private school at West Newton, and in other schools at Newburyport and at Portland. In 1849 he was placed at the head of the State Normal School of Massachusetts, — the first of its kind on American soil, — which he administered with great success for some years. It was in this connection that he became associated with our late eminent General Agent, Dr. Barnas Sears, — at that time

the Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, — whose appreciation of his qualifications and character was so signally manifested a quarter of a century afterwards. In 1875, when Dr. Sears first took in hand the establishment of a Normal College at Nashville, under the auspices of this Board of Trustees for Southern Education, he at once selected Dr. Stearns as the most competent and desirable person for the presidency of that institution. Dr. Stearns received that appointment accordingly, and was also made the Chancellor of the University of Nashville; and in these capacities he did faithful and excellent service for the remaining eleven or twelve years of his life. He met with not a few impediments and discouragements during the early part of this period, and his health and nerves were not always equal to the anxieties and labors which devolved upon him. But he persevered devotedly to the end, and under his untiring care the College had become almost all that either he or we could have expected or desired it to be.

As Chairman of this Board I was in very frequent correspondence with him on the subject of the institution, and I rarely failed of more than one personal consultation with him, summer after summer, and almost every summer, during his visits to his old home in Massachusetts. It affords me a melancholy pleasure, now that he is gone, to bear witness to the fidelity and zeal with which he discharged his responsible and often difficult duties, and to the earnest interest which he ever evinced in promoting the welfare of our great Southern Normal College. His name must always be most honorably associated with the rise and progress of that institution, which it is hoped and believed is destined to be one of the permanent monuments of the bounty and beneficence of George Peabody. It is due to the memory of Dr. Stearns, and to the feelings of his widow and children, that the Records

of this Board should contain some expression of our sense of the services he had rendered to the great work in which we are engaged, and of the loss which we have sustained by his death.

Whereupon, on motion of Gov. James D. Porter, seconded by Bishop Whipple, it was unanimously

Voted, That the foregoing extract from the Chairman's Address be communicated to the widow and family of Dr. Stearns as an expression of the sympathy of the Trustees in their bereavement, and of the grateful sense of the services of Dr. Stearns entertained by the Board.

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